

Nominals with dative suffix as focal elements in the Hungarian clause

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1. Nominals that have a dative suffix usually function as secondary figures (landmarks) in Hungarian clauses. These constructions are construed with a primary figure designated by a nominal in the nominative case: the grammatical subject. But the dative nominals also have other instantiations, used not less frequently than the first type. In certain clause types (e.g., expressing attention or possession), the nominal with dative suffix is construed as the focus of attention, while the nominal with nominative case suffix, the formal grammatical subject, can be understood as the secondary figure. Consider the following examples (grammatical subjects are underlined):

- (1) *A fiú-nak tetszik a lány.*
the boy-DAT like.PRES.3SG the girl.NOM
'The boy likes the girl.'
- (2) *Az igazgató-nak két kastély-a van.*
the director-DAT two castle-POSS3SG is
'The director has two castles.'

In example (1), the nominal *a fiú-nak* (the boy-DAT) is in the focus of attention in relation to the girl-NOM. Similarly in example (2), the nominal *az igazgató-nak* (the director-DAT) is in the focus of attention, in relation to the castle-POSS3SG. In another major type with particular deontic modals, the only participant of the scene is designated by a dative nominal in the clause:

- (3) *Pista-nak el kell menni-e.*
Steve-DAT away must.PRES go.INF-3SG
'Steve must leave.'

In the type represented by clause (3), the nominal with dative is in the focus of attention as the antagonist of the force dynamic relation, while the agonist, the energy source for the deontic compulsion, has no morphosyntactic signifier in the clause.

The main focus of the present paper is to demonstrate how nominals with dative suffix function as focal elements in the clause. The proposed answer starts out from the features of profiling in the clause: the attention focused on the default primary figure (the grammatical subject in nominative case) is

shifted to the semantically secondary figure (the adverbial in dative case). This shift of attention can be traced in historical processes as well as present-day construals in Hungarian. It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with other fundamental aspects of this phenomenon: the effects produced by the semantics of the verbs, word order variants, or the extensive polysemic network of the Hungarian dative.

2. Traditional linguistics in a dependency framework describes the grammatical structure of the sentence using the formal distinction of subject, object, and predicate (i.e., parts of the sentence). Configurational formal grammars build sentence structure on immediate constituents and constituency. In more refined versions, structural grammars distinguish transitive and intransitive sentence types. A sentence with a predicate with two arguments, Agent (coded by the grammatical function A) and Patient (coded by the grammatical function P), is transitive. In an intransitive sentence the predicate has one argument (coded by the grammatical function S). A and S function as subjects, while O functions as object in these descriptions (Palmer 1994, Andrews 1985, Foley & van Valin 1985).

Meanwhile, functional approaches have started to unveil the functional aspects of the main parts of the clausal structure. It is useful to concentrate on the specific category of the subject as a reference point for the notion of focal element. This process was triggered by some new (and old) insights about the clausal structure (cf. García-Miguel 2007: 755): diverse coding means are used for the subject in specific languages, and the structural distribution of the coding features varies in specific languages.

Keenan (1976) worked out a complex modelling approach to the subject category, using structural and functional aspects: autonomy properties (independent existence, indispensability, autonomous reference), case marking properties, semantic role, and immediate dominance. Keenan's matrix adopts the prototype principle: the more features a grammatical relation has, the more it is categorized as a subject. Givón's syntax (in many earlier works and finally in 2001) introduces the notion of topic in a functional interpretation: in his theory, the topic is the designated item in the focus of attention within the clause. The focused item is expressed prototypically by the grammatical relation of the subject. The subject is the grammaticalized primary topic; the direct object is the grammaticalized secondary topic. Thus, the category of topic is based on its discourse pragmatic function. Though differing in many points, M.A.K. Halliday (1994, etc.) treats the central components of the clause as relations in a similar functional vein. The identification of the grammatical subject and the focus of attention in a clause is represented even more definitively by Tomlin (1995, 1997) and Myachykov, Garrod & Scheepers (2009). Still, this identification may be effective for languages with fixed word order and less

for grammars with flexible word order and rich morphology.

This universalistic view results in the notion of “non-canonical” subjects and objects (see, e.g., Aikhenvald, Dixon & Onishi 2001). The Hungarian nominal with dative (and accusative) suffix as focal element can be classified as an example of ‘non-canonical’ subjects, as in numerous other languages like German, Spanish, Turkish, Japanese, Italian, and Russian (cf. Palmer 1994: 40ff., Taylor 1991: 218–220). Adopting the framework of cognitive grammar, prototype effects and profiling with attention shift reveal their role in the construal of the clause. In this way, semantic motivations for nominals with dative (and accusative) as focal elements can be described and explained.

From the perspective of the speaker and the hearer, the clause designates a scene, a simple event. The prototypical clause designates an energy transfer between two participants, energy transfer by a finite verb, and the participants by nominals (epistemically grounded nouns). The nominals elaborate figures within the clause, in valence relation to the verb (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2008). The figures are in an asymmetric relation: one figure, the trajectory, is in the focus of attention, while the other one is secondary. Language is perspectival; i.e., the designated scene is construed from the perspective of the conceptualizer, prototypically the speaker. The elements of construal are the following:

1. semantic roles (inherent of the scene or event)
2. trajector–landmark alignment (according to the perspective of the conceptualizer)
3. syntactic relations (subject, object)
4. topic status (the named entity in the focus of attention in the immediate scope of a clause)
5. force dynamics

The prototypical clause has the following characteristics:

1. action schema: energy transfer
 2. trajector (primary figure): agent, subject, trajector in topic status, agonist
 3. landmark (secondary figure): patient, object, landmark, antagonist
- (4) *A portás ki- nyitotta a kapu-t.*
 the porter.NOM PERF open.PAST.3SG the gate-ACC
 ‘The porter opened the gate.’

An example of the prototypical clause is (4). The action schema is opening (energy transfer), *a portás* (the porter-NOM) is trajector: agent, subject, in topic status, agonist, in clause initial position; *a kapu-t* ‘the gate-ACC’ is landmark: patient, object, antagonist, in clause final position.

The co-occurrence of the elements of construal results in the huge variability of clauses. Clauses with dative nominals as focal elements prove

to be varieties of construing a scene by the diverse co-occurrence of the factors of construal. These clauses do not count as prototypical, although they occur with high frequency. Their prototypicality is lower mainly due to the focused status of the nominal with dative and the secondary status of the nominal in the nominative case.

3. Approaching the construction discussed here, the Hungarian dative postpositional suffix is to be described briefly first. The dative *-nak/-nek* derives from the reconstructed Uralic **nä* 'this' morpheme and the reconstructed Uralic **k* inflectional suffix denoting a lative relation (cf. Korompay 1991: 289, Sárosi 2003: 171, Honti 2004). The dative *-nak/-nek* has a schematic semantic structure with two schematic figures. Its primary meaning comprises a spatial relation, the concept of APPROACH and CONTACT: a smaller, bounded and movable physical object (the primary figure, trajector, mover) approaches another larger, bounded or unbounded physical object (the secondary figure, landmark, goal) on a path, and makes contact with it (see Figure 1.). However, contact is not necessary.

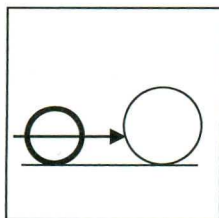


Figure 1. The dative *-nak/-nek*

Examples in (5) demonstrate two instantiations of the dative *-nak/-nek* in its primary spatial meaning.

- (5a) *A hadsereg dél-nak megy.*
 the army.NOM south-DAT go.PRES.3SG
 'The army goes south (i.e., in the end of the process the army does not "make contact" with south).'
- (5b) *A kocsi a fal-nak ment.*
 the car.NOM wall-DAT go.PAST.3SG
 'The car bumped against the wall (i.e., the car made physical contact with the wall at the end of the process).'

Clause (5a) is used mostly in traditional dialects and in historical texts, (5b) is a typical everyday clause. The dative suffix and the secondary figure, landmark, are component structures in the noun stem + case suffix composite structure, wherein the landmark of the schematic suffix is elaborated by the noun stem. This composite structure functions as an

adverbial in the clause. The trajector of the dative suffix is elaborated by another noun, prototypically the nominal functioning as the grammatical subject. The trajector–landmark alignment of the dative suffix corresponds to the trajector–landmark alignment of the verb in the same clause, at least as a default. This characteristic is demonstrated by the fact that a morphological version of the dative suffix is used as a preverbal affix, construing the same scene in a slightly differing way:

- (6) *nekimegy:* *neki+megy*
 towards+go
 ‘bump into, run against’

The great polysemic network of the dative *-nak/-nek* contributes to the large variability of the semantic structures of clauses with a participant designated by a noun stem + the dative *-nak/-nek*, be it a trajector or a landmark. This polysemic network can only be mentioned but not discussed here.

4. In this section I outline the semantic structure of clause types with a participant designated by a noun stem + the dative *-nak/-nek*. Only certain types can be analysed here, in order to arrive at the construction comprising the focal nominal with dative. First two clause types are to be mentioned, whereby the dative *-nak/-nek* designates direct or abstract direction.

4.1. The dative denotes spatial direction (example (5a) is repeated here):

- (5a) *A hadsereg dél-nak megy.*
 the army.NOM south-DAT go.PRES.3SG
 ‘The army goes south.’

The main features are as follows:

- action schema: motion in physical space, along a path (from an indefinite source) towards a specific goal
- the agent, trajector, grammatical subject (*a hadsereg* ‘the army’) in topic status
- force dynamics: neutral
- scene: objectively construed

4.2. The dative denotes abstract direction:

- (7) *A fiú virág-ot ad a lány-nak.*
 the boy.NOM flower-ACC give.PRES.3SG the girl- DAT
 ‘The boy gives flowers to the girl.’

The main features are as follows:

- action schema: giving (the transfer of the patient), along a path, from the definite source (the agent, subject, trajector, topic) towards the specific goal (the benefactive, dative, landmark), in physical and abstract space

- force dynamics: the agonist is the subject, the antagonist is the dative nominal
- scene: objectively construed

Next I give a brief analysis of the semantic extensions of dative nominals – in particular, the construals of possession, attention, compulsion in clausal constructions.

4.3. The dative denotes possession (example (2) is repeated here):

- (2) *Az igazgató-nak két kastély-a van.*
 the director-DAT two castle-POSS3SG is
 'The director has two castles.'

The main features are as follows:

- action schema: possession, the end point of the path of giving, getting, the end position of the theme (on the path, formally the subject, trajector), contact with the goal (the benefactive, dative, landmark, in-topic status), in physical and abstract space
- force dynamics: neutral
- scene: objectively construed

4.4. The dative denotes attention (example (1) is repeated here):

- (1) *A fiú-nak tetszik a lány.*
 the boy-DAT like.PRES.3SG the girl.NOM
 'The boy likes the girl.'

The main features are:

- action schema: attention evocation and response, construed as perception and reaction processing, in a highly abstracted space; the source: *a lány* 'the girl', its profile (active zone): a quality factor, unintentional initiator; the goal: *a fiú* 'the boy', its profile (active zone): unintentional experiencer = benefactive; the final phase of the path, the end position of the source (theme, formally subject, trajector), in contact with the goal (the benefactive, dative, landmark), in physical and abstract space
- force dynamics (in terms of Talmy 2000): agonist force *a lány* 'the girl': present, balance-maintaining, stronger, psychological, nonimpinging, pulling; antagonist force *a fiú* 'the boy': present, balance-maintaining, weaker, psychological, nonimpinging
- scene: objectively construed

4.5. The dative + deontic modal denotes compulsion (example (3) is repeated here):

- (3) *Pistá-nak el kell menni-e.*
 Steve-DAT away must.PRES go.INF-3SG
 'Steve must leave.'

- action schema: compulsion, the final phase of a path where force is transmitted, the end position of an implicit source, in contact with the goal (formally dative, landmark, patient, and topic), agonist force *Pistának* 'Steve-DAT': present, weaker, non-intentional, toward rest, antagonist force: implicit, stronger, intentional, impinging, pushing, toward action
- scene: objectively and subjectively construed.

4.6. In the clauses above, diverse ways of schema modification can be observed. The primary conceptual schema of the dative *-nak/-nek*, summarized in section 3. as a smaller, bounded and movable physical object (the primary figure, trajector, mover) that approaches another larger, bounded or unbounded physical object (the secondary figure, landmark, goal) on a path and makes contact with it, is modified in diverse ways:

1. spatial direction: construed as a physical object that approaches another physical object and makes contact with it (or doesn't), along a path
2. abstract direction: construed as a human being (a definite source) that gives something to somebody (the goal), along a path, in physical and abstract space
3. possession: construed as the possessed entity (the grammatical subject) being at the end position on the path of giving, in contact with the goal (the benefactive dative), in physical and abstract space
4. attention: construed as attention evocation and response processing, in a highly abstracted space; the source is unintentional initiator (the grammatical subject), on the final phase of the path, in contact with the goal, unintentional experiencer and dative, in physical and abstract space
5. compulsion: force is transmitted on the final phase of an abstract path by an implicit source, in contact with the goal (the dative nominal), at the end position of the path

The diverse semantic variants of the dative *-nak/-nek* demonstrated above (without providing an exhaustive list) have evolved through historical processes, resulting in a radial set of meanings. These semantic structures have emerged, on one hand, by the various profiling of the components of the primary meaning schema. More specifically, in the prototypical construction, of all the components of the spatial direction (the physical

object as mover, the other physical object as goal, the path and the movement along the path), the physical object as mover, expressed by its grammatical subject and nominative form is profiled, while the path as a whole and the goal object is backgrounded. The attention is directed to other components in the other versions, mainly to the goal object and the end phase of the path. These attention shifts have a metonymic conceptual base.

The emergence of these semantic structures is a result, on the other hand, of metaphorical and schematizing processes. The path or any of its parts are metaphorized and schematized, this way they denote mental or social direction and intention.

The semantic extensions described above show other regularities of change: besides the original agent-oriented primary figure, theme-oriented figures become focused, and besides the prototypical energy transfer force dynamics emerge as a decisive factor in the temporal relation of the clause. These regular changes in semantic structure are in close relation with the action schema represented by the chosen verb and consequently with the schematic features of the trajector and the landmark (for questions of schema shift, see Lakoff 1987, Tyler & Evans 2003; for regular semantic change, see Traugott & Dasher 2002). I venture to state that the attention shift described above results in the historical modification of the trajectory–landmark alignment among certain verbs used frequently with the nominals with dative suffix as focal elements in the clause.

4.7. The non-typical characteristics of the constructions comprising nominals with dative suffix as focal elements demand a greater degree of mental effort. As a simpler construction, the dative nominal has been changed to nominative in clauses with deontic modals, by changing the V-INF to V-IMPERATIVE especially in colloquial registers, as in (8). The nominative + deontic modal denotes compulsion:

- (8) *Pista* *el* *kell* *menjen.*
 Steve.NOM away must.PRES go.IMPERATIVE.3SG
 ‘Steve must leave.’

The main features and directions in changes are:

1. goal > source
2. dative > nominative
3. modifications towards the prototypical clause
4. action schema: compulsion, the primary figure – formally theme, subject, trajector, and topic – with nominative case suffix + deontic modal auxiliary + main verb in imperative

5. Summary

The primary meaning of the Hungarian *-nak/-nek* dative suffix is direction, ‘towards a goal on a path in 3D space’. The final phase of the path and the goal (a definite point or region in space) have been highly abstracted and schematized. In the constructions demonstrated above, the abstract goal is profiled in composite structures of nominal stem + dative suffix. The historical semantic extensions of the *-nak/-nek* dative suffix rearrange the prototypical co-occurrences of grammatical role, trajector–landmark alignment, semantic role, and topic status in the clause. The result is the nominal with *-nak/-nek* dative suffix in the focus of attention, in topic status, in close valence relation with particular verb types, as well as a shift of attention within the action chain via contextual effects. On the other hand, the grammatical subject has been going through a further desemantization process.

Abbreviations

3SG – third-person singular
ACC – accusative
DAT – dative
IMPERATIVE – imperative
INF – infinitive

NOM – nominative
PAST – past tense
PERF – perfectivising prefix
POSS – possessive
PRES – present tense

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